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ABSTRACT

Fables and trickster tales are short narratives that use animal characters with human features to convey folk wisdom and to help people understand human nature and human behavior. These stories were originally passed down through oral tradition and written down later. The legendary figure Aesop was reported to have orally passed on his animal fables, linked to earlier beast tales from India and later written down by the Greeks and Romans. Ananse trickster tales derive from the Asante people of Ghana and were brought by African slaves to the Caribbean and the United States. These tales developed into Brer Rabbit stories and were written down in the 19th century in the American South. In this unit's lesson plan intended for students in grades K-2, students will become familiar with fables and trickster tales from different cultural traditions and will see how stories change when transferred orally among generations and cultures. The lesson plan can be used to introduce students to world folklore and to explore how folktales convey the perspectives of different world cultures. It is related to the lesson plan "Fables and Trickster Tales around the World" intended for students in grades 3-5. The lesson plan: cites subject areas, time required, and skills developed; provides an introduction; presents learning objectives; poses guiding questions; gives tips for teachers preparing to teach the lesson; suggests (and delineates) two activities for classroom implementation; offers suggestions for extending the lesson; lists Web resources; and addresses standards alignment. (NKA)

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[EDsitement Lesson Plan].

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CS 511 999

Aesop and Ananse: Animal Fables and Trickster Tales

"Through these stories we visit with our ancestors as we receive and, in turn, pass on their wisdom through the millennia."

--(from IAHBING, "The Talking Drum")

Introduction

Fables and trickster tales are short narratives that use animal characters with human features to convey folk wisdom and to help us understand human nature and human behavior. These stories were originally passed down through oral tradition and were eventually written down. The legendary figure Aesop was reported to have orally passed on his animal fables, which have been linked to earlier beast tales from India and were later written down by the Greeks and Romans. Ananse trickster tales derive from the Asante people of Ghana and were brought by African slaves to the Caribbean and parts of the U.S. These tales developed into Brer Rabbit stories and were written down in the 19th century in the American South.

In this unit, students will become familiar with fables and trickster tales from different cultural traditions and will see how stories change when transferred orally between generations and cultures. They will learn how both types of folktales employ various animals in different ways to portray human strengths and weaknesses and to pass down wisdom from one generation to the next. Use the following lessons to introduce students to world folklore and to explore how folktales convey the perspectives of different world cultures.

This unit is related to the lesson Fables and Trickster Tales Around the World, which provides the same background information for the teacher with different activities appropriate for students in grades 3-5. Please note that different versions of spellings of "Ananse" and "Anansi," and of "Asante," "Ashante," and "Ashanti" exist.

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Identify the definition and understand elements of fables and trickster stories
- Recognize Aesop's fables and Ananse spider stories
- Identify the specific narrative and thematic patterns that occur in fables and trickster tales across cultures
- Compare and contrast themes of fables and trickster tales from different cultures
- Differentiate between the cautionary lessons and morals of fables and the celebration of the wiles and wit of the underdog in trickster stories.

Guiding Questions:

What is a fable, and how are fables different from other types of stories?

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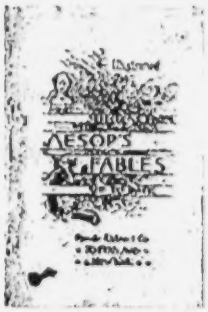
GRADES K-2



Selections From Aesop's Fables, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library Courtesy of American Memory Collection

Subject Areas

Art and Culture

Anthropology

Folklore

History and Social Studies

World History - Africa

World History - Ancient World

World History - Asia/Far East

World History - Europe

Literature and Language Arts

Fiction

World

Time Required

Lesson 1: One class period

Lesson 2: One class period

Skills

Analyzing written and oral texts for plot, theme, and characterization

Working collaboratively

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What is a trickster tale, and how is it different from other types of tales and from fables? What are the elements common to fables and trickster tales? Where does each of these types of stories come from? How have fables and trickster tales been passed down through time and around the world? What kinds of wisdom about human nature and human behavior do we learn from fables, and how is this wisdom relevant today?

Comparing and contrasting

Gathering, classifying, and interpreting written and oral information

Making inferences and drawing conclusions

Observing and describing

Additional Data

Dat e Created: 05/21/02

Preparing to Teach this Lesson

- Review each lesson in this unit and select archival materials you'd like to use in class. If possible, bookmark these materials, along with other useful websites; download and print out selected documents and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing.
- For the cultural context of original Ananse stories, see the Asante Information page in Peoples Resources at Art and Life in Africa Online.
- Review the "Preface" on the Aesop's Fables website, linked through the EDSITEment-reviewed web resource Internet Public Library. The "Preface" provides information on the history of Aesop's fables and on the definition of fables in general. The Aesop's Fables website notes: "It has been said that Aesop only created but a few of the Fables, but he is still regarded as the greatest story teller of all time, and thus fables are most always attributed to him" (from Aesop's Fables Online Collection, Detailed Information).

Suggested Activities

Telling Stories - Writing Stories
Fables and Tales from Different Cultures
Extending the Lesson

Lesson 1 Telling Stories - Writing Stories

Read to the class the Ashanti fable from West Africa, "Anansi Tries to Steal All the Wisdom in the World."

Go over the following vocabulary from the story: Wise, clever, wisdom, outwit, gourd, chuckle, suitable, journey, creature, progress, proceed.

Point out the last line of the story as folk wisdom, a typical ending feature of Ananse stories: "And this is how wisdom came to the world."

Have students identify characteristics of this story and use this list of elements to collaboratively devise a definition of a fable or trickster tale as a short narrative that uses animal characters with human features to convey some universal truth about human nature and human behavior and to pass down wisdom from earlier generations in ways that can be used for present-day situations. Point out to students that, while fables tend to end in moral or cautionary lessons, trickster tales often celebrate values or actions that are disapproved of by society but that may be necessary for the survival and success of the small and weak; together, fables and trickster stories allow us to see the complexities of the human character. Ask students what they think about the Spider character in the story, whether they like him and his actions, and why? Why is Spider called a "trickster"?

Use the information from Preparing the Lesson to discuss with students the notion of "the talking drum," a story that is passed orally through generations and cultures, and that changes as it moves from person to person and from place to place. Discuss with students the differences between telling and writing stories, and ask them what the advantages and disadvantages are of the oral and written forms.

To illustrate to students how stories change when passed down orally, have them play the Operator game: Have students sit in a circle and tell one student a secret message. The students then repeat the message by whispering it in another student's ear. Ask the last student hearing the message to say it out loud, and see how it has changed from the original message.

After playing the Operator game, you can ask students to retell the Ananse tale and note how the story has changed in the retelling, or have them write or draw the story to see how it becomes fixed after being committed to paper.

Lesson 2 Fables and Tales from Different Cultures

The following lesson has two versions at differing levels, one for Kindergarten and one for first and second grades. For both levels, go over the following vocabulary words and folktale elements with students. Then read to students or have them read the following stories, and discuss how these words are elements in the fable and trickster tale.

Vocabulary Words:

Folktale
Fable
Trickster Story
Oral Tradition
Moral
Folk Wisdom

Elements of Folktales:

Folktales...
... are very old stories
... have special beginnings (such as "Once upon a time..." or "There once was...") and endings
... often repeat words or sentences
...have characters, settings, problems, and solutions

Kindergarten Activity:

The following are two sets of one fable and one trickster story that have related themes and lessons. You can pick one set of stories and complete the activity as a class, or divide the class into two groups and have each group work on one set of stories.

The first set of stories involves cases where the less powerful of two animals who are natural enemies frees the more powerful animal. The divergent responses of the animals freed lead to different lessons. Using the Venn Diagram below, have students identify and then compare and contrast the characters, problem and solution, and moral of these two stories.

Set A:

Both from Aesop's Fables, Online Collection, located through the EDSITEment-reviewed website Internet Public Library:

"The Lion and the Mouse" (Aesop)
(another similar version)

"Mr. Buffu and the Snake" (Ananse) Located on the Caribbean Folktales page (Scroll down to story)

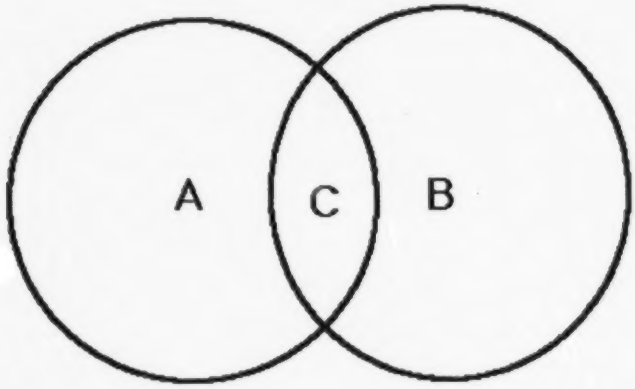
Set B:

Anansi and the Turtle ,
located at Myths and Fables from Around the World from KidsZone, available through the EDSITEment-reviewed website Internet Public Library.

The Fox and the Crane,
from Aesop's Fables, Online Collection, located through the EDSITEment-reviewed website Internet Public Library.

For both sets of stories, ask students to compare the animals and their behavior in the fable and the trickster tale. Why do the types of animals change or not from one culture's fable to the next? How does the behavior change according to the type of animal? What types of behaviors lead to what types of endings in these stories?

Have students fill in an online version of the following Venn Diagram for their set of stories:



They must choose whether the following elements belong to one or the other story or are shared by both, depending on whether they are the same or different in the two stories: Characters, Setting, Problem, Solution, Moral/Lesson.

Ask students to compare the characters, setting, plot, and lessons of these stories. Which characters did they like best? Which did they like least? Which story had the best ending? The best moral? To see how fables teach universal lessons, ask students to think of a real-life situation that applies to one of the stories.

1st and 2nd Grade Activity:
The following stories involve cases where the less powerful of two animals (including one human) who are natural enemies frees the more powerful animal. The divergent responses of the animals freed lead to different lessons about human behavior and values. Using the chart below, have students identify the fable elements, characters, problem and solution, and moral of these stories.

"The Lion and the Mouse" (Aesop)
(another similar version)

"Mr. Buffu and the Snake" (Ananse) Located on the Caribbean Folktales page (Scroll down to story)

"The Tiger in the Trap" (Korean)

"The Tiger, the Brahman, and the Jackal" (India)

Have students fill out an online or printed-out version of the Story Structure Chart:

	Title	Title	Title	Title
Story Elements				
Characters				
Problem				
Solution				
Lesson/Moral				

Ask students to compare the characters, plot, and lessons of these stories. Which characters did they like best? Which did they like least? Which story had the best ending and why? Have students compare the animals and their behavior in each story: Why do the types of animals change or not from one culture's fable to the next? How does the behavior change according to the type of animal? What types of behaviors lead to what types of endings in these stories? To see how fables teach universal lessons about human nature and behavior, ask students to think of a real-life situation that applies to one of the stories.

Extending the Lesson

- The American stories referred to as Brer Rabbit stories are actually Ananse Stories (the wise trickster spider) that were brought to the United States and the Caribbean by African-American slaves. To develop a history of this type of trickster tale, have students trace the connections between the two sets of stories and locate the places in Africa and the U.S. and Caribbean where these stories are found. This topic also brings up questions about the roles and identities of the people who created the stories versus those who eventually wrote them down - Who is telling the story? Whose story is it? What is the relationship of the writer towards his or her characters?
    - The EDSITEment-reviewed website American Studies at the University of Virginia has created one of its Ongoing Hypertext Projects on Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus and His Friends* (1892). The website, *Melissa Murray and Dominic Perella on Joel Chandler Harris, Uncle Remus*. [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/remus/remus.html], provides several Uncle Remus stories from Harris' book, accompanied by the editors' own social and historical commentary; background and contextual information on the Uncle Remus stories and on Harris, including four contemporary reviews of the Uncle Remus collections; a biography of Joel Chandler Harris; and some other essays and tales written by Harris that indicate Harris' attitude towards race relations.
    - For resources on African folktales, see the Bibliography on African Storytelling, available on K-12 Educational Resources (U of Wisconsin-Madison), located on the K-12 Electronic Guide for African Resources on the Internet, at the EDSITEment-reviewed website African Studies WWW.
    - From Remus to Rap: A History in Theory and Practice of the African-American Storytelling Tradition by Joshua Perlstein, available through the EDSITEment-reviewed website KidReach: The Online Reading Center, traces the storytelling tradition in African-American culture:
        - "Most of the animal tales found their roots in African mythology. The characters of Rabbit, Bear, and Fox all have their African counterparts. It is the character of Rabbit that most often represents the slaves' own position. Rabbit is essentially a trickster, much like Anansi the spider in African mythology. Rabbit is constantly using his brains to overcome the

obstacles placed in his way by the more overpowering animals. By replacing the slaves' persona with this animal, the teller empowered the listener by suggesting that there were ways to overcome the biggest obstacles in their lives as well. In most of these stories the main characters are neither good nor evil. It is an interesting facet of black American storytelling that the stories were as complex morally as the conditions that the storytellers found themselves living in. Often, the tricks that were attempted by Rabbit failed. By creating this imperfect hero, the storyteller seems to be telling the listener not to get too overconfident about the prospects for change. It is interesting to compare this mythology with something like the Odyssey, in which the hero always seems to conquer impossible odds. The difference may lie in the cultures that supported these myths: one, the Greeks, was the dominant culture of its time; the other, the slaves, were the repressed culture of their time. By this we can see how much mythology reflects the present as much as the past."

- Explain the differences between myths, legends, fairy tales, and fables. Give some examples of each type of story and let students sort them by category, or ask students to research their own examples of each of these narrative forms. The Preface on the Aesop's Fables website, linked through the EDSITEment-reviewed web resource Internet Public Library, defines and differentiates the tale, the parable, and the fable:
    - "The tale, the Parable, and the Fable are all common and popular modes of conveying instruction. Each is distinguished by its own special characteristics. The Tale consists simply in the narration of a story either founded on facts, or created solely by the imagination, and not necessarily associated with the teaching of any moral lesson. The Parable is the designed use of language purposely intended to convey a hidden and secret meaning other than that contained in the words themselves; and which may or may not bear a special reference to the hearer, or reader. The Fable partly agrees with, and partly differs from both of these. It will contain, like the Tale, a short but real narrative; it will seek, like the Parable, to convey a hidden meaning, and that not so much by the use of language, as by the skillful introduction of fictitious characters; and yet unlike either Tale or Parable, it will ever keep in view, as its high prerogative, and inseparable attribute, the great purpose of instruction, and will necessarily seek to inculcate some moral maxim, social duty, or political truth."
    - In Folktales: What Are They?, available through the EDSITEment-reviewed website KidReach: The Online Reading Center, Stacy Carney defines the folktale and provides a list of distinctive elements as well as a categorization of different types of folktale.

Selected EDSITEment Websites

- African Studies WWW
- K-12 Electronic Guide for African Resources on the Internet
    - K-12 Educational Resources (U of Wisconsin-Madison)
        - Bibliography on African Storytelling
- American Studies at the University of Virginia
- Cultural Objects: An Anthology of American Studies, Vol. II: Spring 1996
    - Cultural Objects Table of Contents
    - *Melissa Murray and Dominic Perella on Joel Chandler Harris, Uncle Remus*
- "Anansi Tries to Steal All the Wisdom in the World"
- Art and Life in Africa Online
    - Peoples Resources
        - Asante Information page

- Asia Source
- Myths and legends
  - Korean Folktales
    - "The Tiger in the Trap
- Internet Public Library
- Pathfinder: Fairy Tales Reading and Research
  - Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts
    - Aesop's Fables: Online Collection
      - Selected Aesop's Fables
        - The Fox and the Cat and other fables of Aarne-Thompson type 105 about the dangers of being too clever
- Indian Fairy Tales, Jacobs, Joseph
- Located on the Caribbean Folktales page "Mr. Buffu and the Snake"

EDSITEment Partner Site Resources:

ARTSEDGE Lesson Plans:

- Exaggeration, Folktales, and Characters

Other Information

Standards Alignment

1. ACTFL-2.1

   Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied more

2. ACTFL-2.2

   Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied more

3. ACTFL-4.2

   Demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and one's own more

4. NCSS-1

   Culture and cultural diversity. more

5. NCSS-2

   Time, continuity, and change. The ways human beings view themselves in and over time. more

6. NCSS-3

   People, places, and environments. more

7. NCSS-9

   Global connections and interdependence. more

8. NCTE/IRA-1

   Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. more

9. NCTE/IRA-10

   Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.

10. NCTE/IRA-11

    Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

11. NCTE/IRA-12

    Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). more

12. NCTE/IRA-2

    Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. more

13. NCTE/IRA-3

    Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. more

14. NCTE/IRA-4

    Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. more

15. NCTE/IRA-5

    Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. more

16. NCTE/IRA-6

    Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts. more

17. NCTE/IRA-7

    Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience. more

18. NCTE/IRA-8

    Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
    more

19. NCTE/IRA-9

    Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

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